DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 039 248 TE 001 845

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TITLE Creative English Curriculum: June 1, 1970 to May 29, 1971.
INSTITUTION Shawnee Mission Public Schools, Kans.
PUB DATE [70]
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.80
DESCRIPTORS *Cooperative Planning, *Curriculum Development, Departmental Teaching Plans, Effective Teaching, *Elective Subjects, *English Instruction, Experimental Curriculum, *Experimental Programs, Independent Study, Program Evaluation, Remedial Instruction, Secondary Education, Student Interests, Teamwork

ABSTRACT

Attempting to overcome the problems of traditional classroom approaches and the tendency of teachers untrained in new phases of English instruction to simply "do their own thing," the Shawnee Mission Northwest High School has designed a Creative English Curriculum for the 1970-71 school year. In the proposed program, teachers with different talents and backgrounds will form teams of four to seven members which will meet daily to plan and evaluate teaching strategies. Those teachers with specialties will give three or four short elective courses for students during the school year, as well as share their knowledge with colleagues. Students will have the opportunity to elect those courses which suit their interests and abilities, to engage in independent study or remedial work, and to join with faculty in pre- and post-program evaluation. (Diagrams for some of the proposed electives for grades 10-12 are included.) (Author/MF)

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ED039248

CREATIVE ENGLISH CURRICULUM

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SHAWNEE MISSION PUBLIC SCHOOLS

June 1, 1970 to May 29, 1971

TE 001 845

Abstract

The Shawnee Mission High Schools have made a number of efforts to modernize the English curriculum, but the habits imposed by a traditional approach have made it very difficult to bring about much change in the English classroom. The proposed Creative English Curriculum will be designed to establish conditions that should encourage the creation of a rich and relevant curriculum. Teachers will be scheduled in common planning periods to form teams of four to seven members. Each team will plan together the daily strategies of teaching language, literature, composition, and English skills and they will also critique their efforts. They will create the curriculum for their students. Out of the strand of their curriculum they will at three or four intervals during the school year offer elective short courses and/or independent study. If there are four team members, they will offer three courses and one teacher will work with students on independent study as well as with other students who have been counseled to spend this time on remediation. The Creative English Curriculum should provide for a structured course with the flexibility of short courses growing out of this structure. The plan should take advantaged of the varying talents and backgrounds of the teachers and should also provide for student influence on the curriculum since their choices will determine to an extent what is taught and what is not taught.

Problem and Objectives

English curriculum development in the Shawnee Mission High Schools has been difficult because of three problems. The traditional programs in use have not interested the students. Curriculum development employing various aspects of "new English" has required special knowledge and training that teachers have not experienced in their college work. In addition it has been difficult to employ ideas in curriculum development that require flexibility because the Shawnee Mission buildings and the Shawnee Mission schedule of classes are both traditional in nature.

In the last fifteen years in the Shawnee Mission School District there have been two plans for developing curriculum in English. The first has been to select a textbook committee which in turn selected two textbooks, one for literature and one for composition and grammar. These books were intended to be the curriculum. The second approach used more recently has also involved a committee. This committee two years ago devised a curriculum outline of the program from seven through twelve and purchased multiple texts to help the teacher carry out the objectives set forth in the outline. In addition, the committee working in the summer has completed rather extensive curriculum guides suggesting ways to teach the curriculum.

While both of these methods have had some influence on what has happened in the classroom, neither has provided an up-to-date curriculum employing the many new discoveries of ways to teach English as well as the new discoveries concerning what to teach. Teachers can still do what they want in an English class since English is so general. It is easy to avoid the suggested curriculum.

There is probably good reason for an English teacher moving away from designed curriculum whether it be centered in textbook or curriculum guide. English does cover a wide area extending from the most heavily structured grammar studies to the free wheeling creative activities of poetry writing or film making. These wide activities invite many types of people into English teaching. Some are comfortable with the "trees" of transformational grammar or the identifiable patterns of expository writing, and others seem most happy when dealing with drama or with high powered intellectual discussions about Henry David Thoreau. A teacher at one end of the spectrum might shy away from teaching something at the other end even though the curriculum guide calls for him to give some attention to this item. In short, English teaching has become so complex in the last ten years that it has become quite difficult for one English teacher to go it alone. Since it is easier and safer to do "one's" own thing, many teachers do just that and give very little attention to some parts of the curriculum, especially those parts that call for a knowledge of new grammar, logic, impromptu drama, new rhetoric, and film making. Colleges certainly have not been preparing teachers to deal with these new aspects of English.

Part of national movements in English education indicate that greater use of independent study and student election of courses seems to be successful. English teachers in our system have been under some pressure to innovate. Most of this pressure has come from outside the school system. The net result is a desire on the part of some English teachers to innovate and a resistance to innovation by some of the principals. This resistance, of course, is understandable when most proposals made for change in the last two years have called for extensive scheduling changes. Since our buildings have traditional sized rooms with permanent walls, and since there seems to be reluctance to move to a modular schedule in the high schools, suggestions for innovation have been rejected or have never been carried to the proposal stage for fear that they would be rejected.

Knowing that we cannot change our buildings, knowing that these buildings to an extent require that our schedule remain somewhat traditional, knowing that innovations of other school systems around the country bringing about flexibility and student choice have been successful, and knowing that a rich, relevant, exciting curriculum has not yet happened in more than a few classrooms in the district, we have a proposal for Creative English Curriculum employing grade level teams who will create a curriculum that generates branching elective short courses.

The entire English staff of Shawnee Mission Northwest High School plans to use the Creative English Curriculum during the 1970-71 school year. Each of the other four high schools plan a pilot for next year involving one team using the Creative English Curriculum.

Specific objectives of the program:

To improve instruction by

1. Creating a situation in which teachers can plan together during school time

2. Encouraging group planning so that teachers with special background and interest in an area will help others who might not be as strong in that area

3. Providing an arrangement that should more effectively orient new teachers and train student teachers

4. Developing a competitive atmosphere that should bring about better teaching

5. Providing an opportunity for teachers to teach their specialties in the short courses

To improve student attitudes by

1. Allowing students to elect short courses that suit their interests

2. Allowing students to elect short courses that fit their abilities

3. Encouraging students, through electing courses, to express their preferences and influence the teachers in what kinds of courses will be offered

4. Improving instruction through cooperative planning by teachers

5. Providing special help for students who need remediation

6. Providing opportunities for students who would respond well to independent study

Procedures

Evaluation--

Plans for evaluation call for a pre-project assessment of student and teacher attitudes toward English which will be followed by a post project assessment of those attitudes. Follow-up statements will be sought from teachers, principals, counselors, and parents who are in a position to hear students reveal their attitudes about English classes.

Individual teams will be engaged in daily assessment of their efforts. They will be encouraged to develop specific objectives for their lessons, to communicate those objectives to their students, and to test with the objectives in mind.

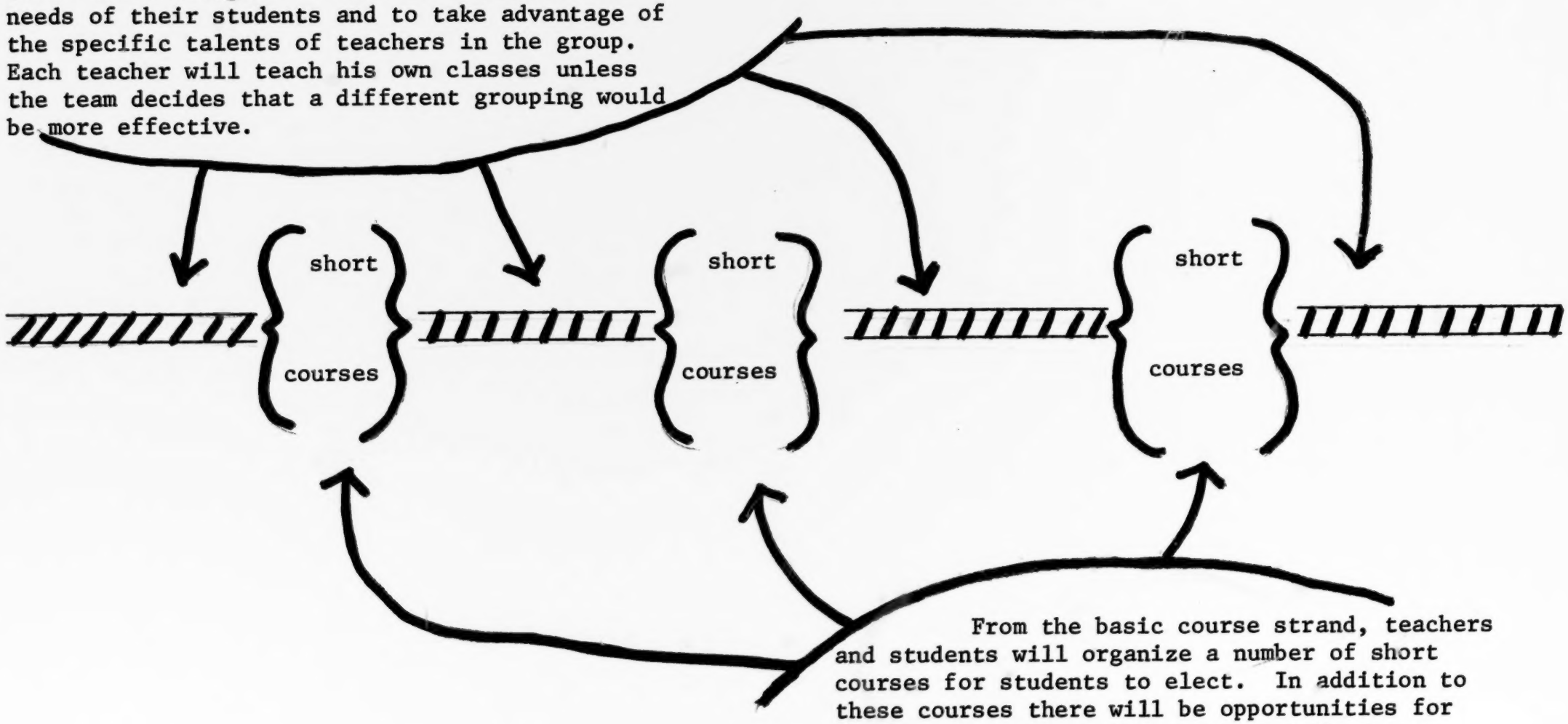
The district has been using a follow-up study of graduates who go to college. Records of graduates participating in Creative English Curriculum will be compared to those having followed the traditional schedule so that we can measure any significant difference in college English grades.

Further help for evaluation will be sought from the Shawnee Mission Public School Research Department.

The Plan--

The plan to establish a Creative English Curriculum in the Shawnee Mission High Schools involves two innovations. The first employs teams of teachers (preferably no fewer than four teachers on one team) who plan together but teach their separate classes. The second innovation would grow out of team plans since this team could, at various times during the year, offer short courses for the students to elect. The following diagram should explain this plan:

A group of teachers on one grade level will meet during the year in a common planning period to determine the most effective ways to teach specific materials. They will develop a continuous strand throughout the year designed to meet objectives established in the district language arts curriculum guide. They will employ their own strategies to meet the interests and needs of their students and to take advantage of the specific talents of teachers in the group. Each teacher will teach his own classes unless the team decides that a different grouping would be more effective.



From the basic course strand, teachers and students will organize a number of short courses for students to elect. In addition to these courses there will be opportunities for students to work on independent study or on individual improvement in language arts skills under the direction of a teacher.

Hopefully, the team would have a common planning period so that they could meet on school time to decide day by day strategies for teaching English. For example, they might discuss at length the proper approach for teaching Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher." Should there be a preliminary discussion before students read this story? How many days should be spent on the discussion? What questions should be asked? Would small group work be effective? Would the discussion be related to Poe's own theories about the construction of the short story? Should the students write a composition concerning this story, and, if so, how much time should be spend on that activity? Should there be a lab period before the themes are handed in? What should be the emphasis in that theme? How should the themes be evaluated?

The team would actually create the curriculum on the spot, use it in class, and have feedback from its members concerning student performance so that evaluation could be made before teaching the next item. There would be continuous evaluation that would immediately influence the curriculum.

In their planning, the team would attempt to meet objectives set up by the district. However, they would be in communication with their department chairman and with the district consulting teacher and would be in a position to suggest modification of the district objectives. If they feel an objective is unrealistic or unsuitable, they could use actual examples from their classes to argue for change. Consequently, the curriculum would be built at the classroom level rather than at the district level.

Teams would be established incorporating teachers with differing talents and backgrounds. The grammarian could become the leading advisor during a unit in grammar, the drama oriented teacher could help all teachers during a drama unit, the composition expert could offer advice on techniques for planning themes and techniques for evaluation of written work, and the semanticist could constantly remind teachers of their duties in teaching language in all units.

The teams would determine what is to be taught and would receive group advice before teaching it, but each member would have his own classes. Perhaps they could determine other divisions of students if the subject at hand seemed to call for different groupings. For example, four teachers could divide their students into five groups each hour. One teacher could work with a large group and the other three could teach small groups. Each student would attend two large groups and three small groups during that week.

1	4	2	5	3	
2	5	3	1	4	Seminar groups
3	1	4	2	5	
4	2	5	3	1	Large group
5	3	1	4	2	

Even though large group instruction has not proved to be very effective, there might be times when a guest speaker or a film would best be handled in a large group. If so, the team could acquire the little theater all day and their classes could meet in one group. In this arrangement some team members could be released during the day for grading or planning.

The "team planning" innovation would provide group decision for teaching and evaluating, would create a curriculum to be taught immediately, would meet district objectives, would provide a basis for common experiences in one high school by students at that grade level, would provide more structure at each grade level, and would provide an opportunity for the department chairman in that high school and the district coordinator to be involved in some of the planning sessions to influence the teaching as well as to learn more about what works best in the teaching of English so that they can communicate these discoveries to other teams and to other schools.

Perhaps the use of group planning indicates that too much structure will be provided as the team might fall into lock step. However, the second innovation would create the flexibility necessary to establish a balance. There would probably be a number of times during the year that the team could offer short courses for student election. These courses would grow out of the strand developed by the team and would be offered for enrichment, in-depth study, reinforcement, or remediation.

If there were four teachers in the team, four courses could be offered (five if a student teacher were assigned to the team). Perhaps the team would prefer to assign one teacher to independent study. This independent study could be an option for any student who could produce a plan for study during the short course offerings, and it could also provide for individual remediation of students having difficulty with a particular aspect of English.

Students would have some control over the short courses since their choices would, to an extent, determine which courses would be taught and which would not. Perhaps the team would wish to use a student survey before publishing the offerings.

Short courses could take advantage of differing teacher talents and could also be arranged in varying levels of difficulty. Such an arrangement might provide for individual differences to the extent that tracking would no longer be necessary.

Following are five suggested courses of study that teams in those grades might employ. However, these are merely illustrations of what might be done. The strength of Creative English Curriculum is that the team involved would be best equipped to create the curriculum for their students. These examples should illustrate and not dictate what a team might do.

Grade 10

Basic Strand

Short Elective Courses
(Short Stories)

Systems of human behavior
Characteristics of those systems
The role of assumptions in the thinking process
Short story as system
"The Devil and Daniel Webster"
Composition

- Great American short stories
- Great American and Macmillan
- Macmillan short stories
- Independent study and/or remediation (General Electives)

Perspective of the poet
Individual reading of poetry
Composition

Kinds of systems
Grammar

- Poetry
- Grammar
- Research: attitude toward usage
- Research: usage in the community
- Independent study and/or remediation (Drama as Definition)

Defining and its influence on thought
Definitions in conflict
Composition

- Julius Caesar
- The Caine Mutiny
- Thunder on Sycamore Street
- Independent study and/or remediation (Perspective in the Novel)

Perspective in satire and irony
Devices to communicate tone
How do these devices determine the subject and the reader's response
Composition

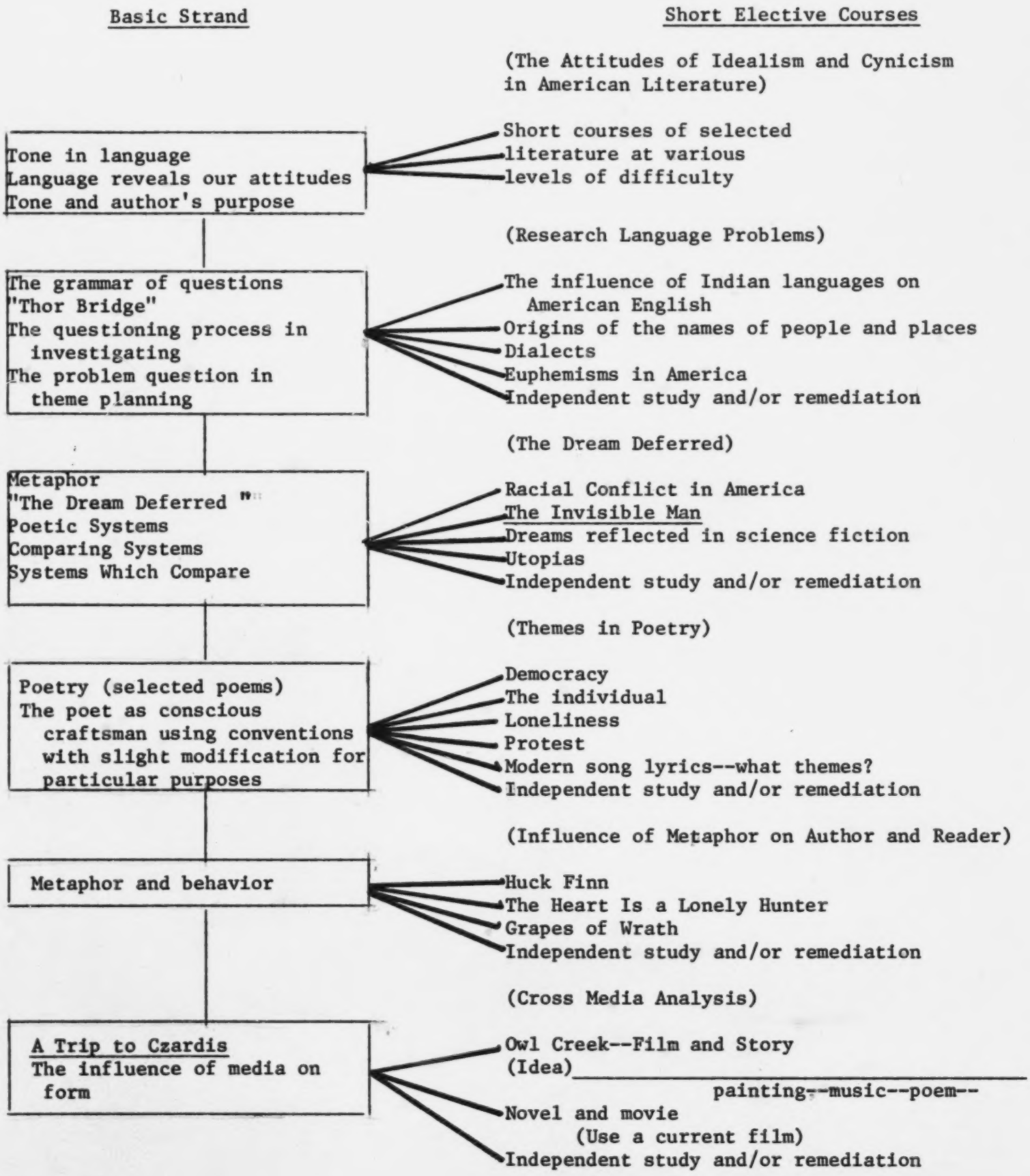
- A Separate Peace
- Tale of Two Cities
- Catcher in the Rye
- Independent reading and/or remediation (Semantics in the Language of Today)

Theme in literature
How perspective reinforces theme
Composition

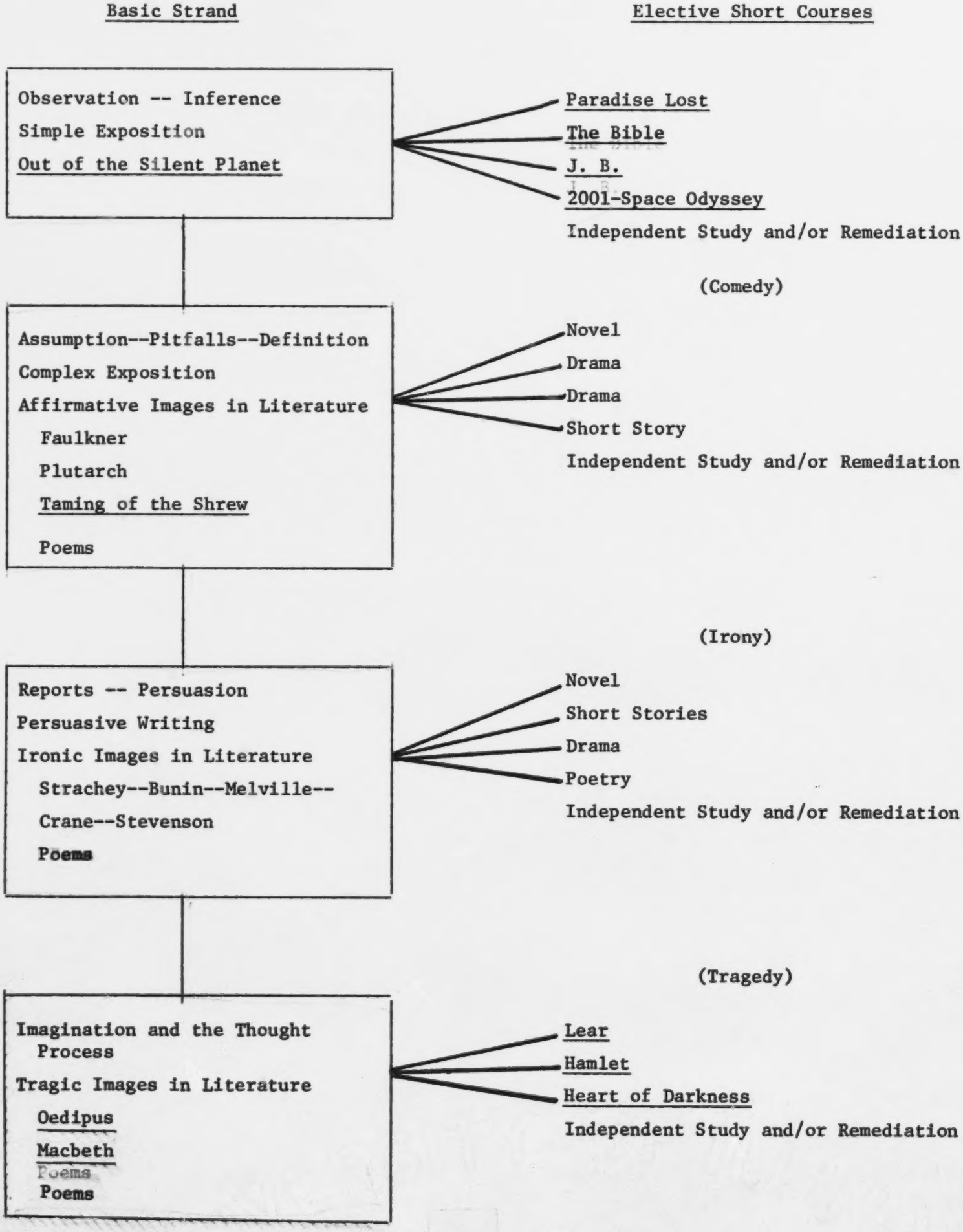
Semantics
Either... or
Levels of abstraction
Definition as composition

- Politics
- Recorded conversations
- Talk shows on TV
- Advertising
- Independent study, etc.

Grade 11


Basic Strand
Short Elective Courses
(The Attitudes of Idealism and Cynicism in American Literature)
Tone in language
Language reveals our attitudes
Tone and author's purpose
Short courses of selected literature at various levels of difficulty
(Research Language Problems)
The grammar of questions
"Thor Bridge"
The questioning process in investigating
The problem question in theme planning
The influence of Indian languages on American English
Origins of the names of people and places
Dialects
Euphemisms in America
Independent study and/or remediation
(The Dream Deferred)
Metaphor
"The Dream Deferred"
Poetic Systems
Comparing Systems
Systems Which Compare
Racial Conflict in America
The Invisible Man
Dreams reflected in science fiction
Utopias
Independent study and/or remediation
(Themes in Poetry)
Poetry (selected poems)
The poet as conscious craftsman using conventions with slight modification for particular purposes
Democracy
The individual
Loneliness
Protest
Modern song lyrics--what themes?
Independent study and/or remediation
(Influence of Metaphor on Author and Reader)
Metaphor and behavior
Huck Finn
The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter
Grapes of Wrath
Independent study and/or remediation
(Cross Media Analysis)
A Trip to Czardis
The influence of media on form
Owl Creek--Film and Story
(Idea)
painting--music--poem--
Novel and movie
(Use a current film)
Independent study and/or remediation

Grade 12 (Using Idea of Man and Thought and Statement)



Grade 12 (Using The Idea of Man and Language and Reality)

Basic Strand

Communication, Symbolism, and Community
What Is Language?
What Is Man?
Simple Exposition
Out of the Silent Planet

Elective Short Courses
- Paradise Lost
- Bible and J. B.
- Myths of Early Cultures
- Legend
- Independent Study and/or Remediation

Language and Reality
Metaphor--Grammar--Vocabulary
Complex exposition
Affirmative Images in Literature
Faulkner--Plutarch--Shakespeare
Poetry

(Comedy)
- Goldsmith--Sheridan
- Moliere
- Musical Comedy
- Picaresque Novel
- Independent Study and/or Remediation

Communication of Information
Communication of Social Values
Exposition--Persuasion
Ironic Images in Literature
Strachey--Bunin--Melville--
Crane--Stevenson
Poetry

(Literature of Other Cultures)
- Eastern
- African
- Spanish and Latin American
- Germanic and Scandinavian
- Independent Study and/or Remediation

Communication of Feeling
Exposition--Internal Research
Sophocles--Shakespeare--
Conrad

- Lear
- Hamlet
- Heart of Darkness
- Independent Study and/or Remediation

Here are some possible strengths of the proposed Creative English Curriculum:

1. Provide for individual differences without tracking
2. Allow for independent study in short units that have immediate results
3. Provide for some unstructured time, small group work, and combined classes without scheduling problems
4. Allow for the development of continuity in English rather than the fragmentation of semester courses
5. Employ group planning that should develop creative teaching, as well as immediate analysis of problems in teaching
6. Allow for student options and encourage student help in designing the short courses
7. Provide for the teacher a framework of comparison so that he can see his own efforts in relation to others on the team
8. Increase teacher ability
9. Expose teacher weaknesses that are hidden from the teacher himself
10. Provide an ideal learning situation for the new teacher
11. Develop in the Shawnee Mission District a unique approach to teaching that might upgrade instruction in other departments
12. Allow through the short courses a development of humanities without the need of scheduling a separate class
13. Provide an opportunity for better use of individual teacher talents and backgrounds
14. Provide time for special remediation needed by some students

Grade level teams may encounter the following problems:

1. Some teachers may not be tough enough to work on a team that might expose their weaknesses
2. Some of the team ideas could easily engage teachers in more work
3. The best schedule would provide for common planning periods so that teams could plan during the school day and this arrangement might pose a difficult problem for principals
4. There is still some danger that teachers would develop short courses following their own interests rather than student interest
5. If this approach works, teachers who do not want to participate might undergo undue pressure from students and colleagues
6. A student may feel disoriented because of a change in teachers.

Use to be made of the findings

At the present time, Northwest High School plans to use the Creative English Curriculum in the 1970-71 school year after experimenting with the method in the Spring of 1970. It is hoped that some of the other high schools will use the approach with at least one team. If the plan is successful, our first use to be made of the findings would be to persuade other Shawnee Mission teachers to use the plan. We would hope that other departments might profit from our discoveries.

In addition, we plan to write articles for the Kansas Association of Teachers of English magazine and for the national English Journal, and to ask for the opportunity to discuss the plan with other schools in the area if its success provides us with that opportunity.

Personnel

There will be very little need for additional personnel. A project director will be needed to plan and coordinate the activities of teachers involved in the summer workshops. Additionally, a special person will be needed to direct the research and evaluation needed for this project.

During the school year the consulting teacher in the district, the department chairmen, and the teachers on the teams should be able to manage the project. Effort will be made to assign a student teacher to each team.

No special facilities will be needed.